16. "In the Greek Manner": Imported Icons in the West

a. The Eastern Origin: Idea and Reality

Bishop Altman of Passau (d. 1091), his biographer tells us, received as a gift from the dukes of Bohemia "a precious panel with an excellent metal case [*caelatura*], on which the Virgin was depicted in the Greek manner [*graeco opere*]."[1] Such imported icons came to the West at all times, but their influence on panel painting culminated in the thirteenth century, above all in Italy. The importation also persisted afterward, but by then imported icons had long come to be regarded as venerable originals from ancient times, with legends surrounding them. Replicas, whose archaisms distinguish them from other artworks produced at the time, addressed religious desires for the authentic image, not the criteria of contemporary art.

Pre-thirteenth-century imported icons are more commonly to be recognized in their reflections in quite different artistic media. The seal of the convent at Schwarz-rheindorf in 1172, for example, shows a Tender Virgin with Child, which, complete with Greek lettering, clearly reveals contact with an Eastern icon, perhaps one seen in Cologne.[2] Such echoes of icons are not uncommon. They are found in manuscript painting[3] as well as in wall painting[4] and stone reliefs.[5]

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A twelfth-century pattern book from the Upper Rhine contains a list of seventy-five drawings that mentions full-length *Maiestas* depictions and half-length pictures (*dimidia figura*) of the Virgin and other saints according to the pattern of icons.[6] The laconic reference to a "Theodore on horseback with another saint" does not make clear that it alludes to an icon of two mounted saints that was common at the time of the Crusades. But the drawing, which in this case has survived, leaves no doubt.

If imported icons still exist, they usually have suffered from heavy use and often have had more of an impact through the legends attached to them. The legends, however, seldom tell us the historical truth about the icons' origins, since they generally claim a provenance from the East. A happy exception is the small icon of St. Nicholas in Aachen-Burtscheid, which was given a Gothic metal frame in the thirteenth century. Already at this early time, the legends deal with its origin in the East and celebrate the miracles it had worked in the West.[7] The Gothic inscription on the frame says that "the ycona of Nicholas shines in the glory of the saint's virtues." In his book of miracles written in 1223, the Cistercian Caesarius of Heisterbach tells of the miracles performed by the icon, particularly for women in labor. It had been brought to Aachen by the son of a Greek king, he wrote, and "the miraculous portrait is said to have been painted from life."

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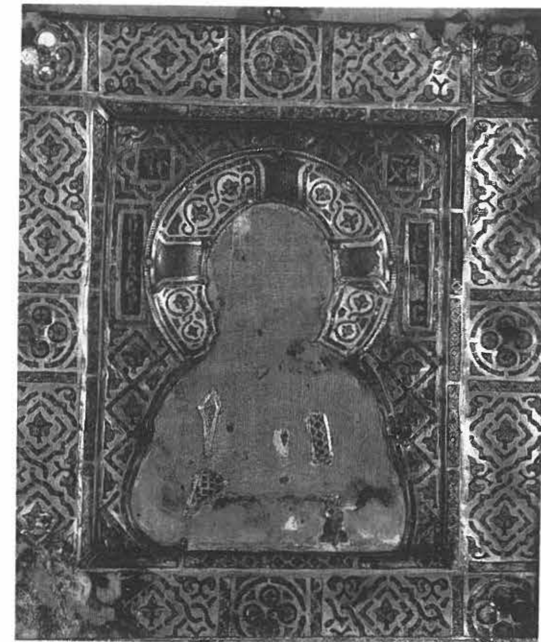
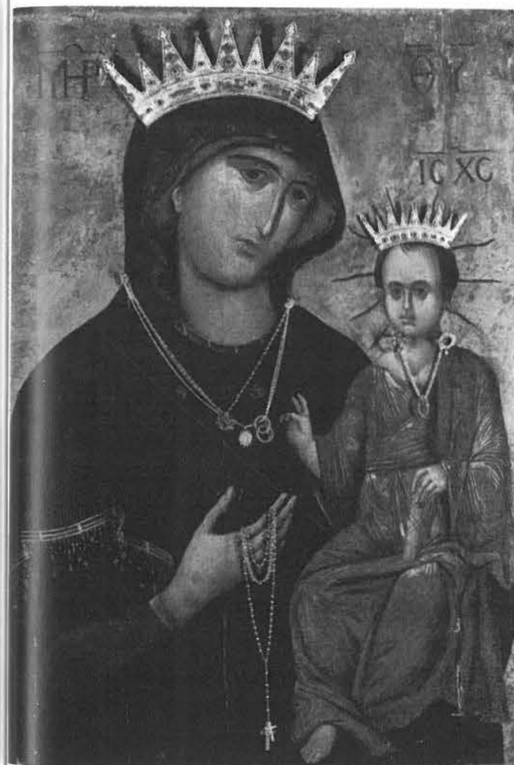
The icon itself, "restored" to the point of unrecognizability, was probably valued primarily for its mosaic technique, which was unfamiliar in the West from panel images. The value attached to technical or technological rarities increased further in the Renaissance, when the icon no longer was considered to have anything to teach in the artistic sense. A Greek icon of Christ in Florence is mentioned in the first Medici





197. Aachen-Burtscheid; icon of St. Nicholas, 12th and 13th centuries

198. Rome, S. Prassede; enamel icon from Constantinople, 12th century

199. Venice, SS. Giovanni e Paolo; Madonna della Pace, 14th century

200. Düsseldorf, Central State Archives; seal from Schwarzrheindorf for the year 1172

catalogs as a precious object because of its mosaic technique.[8] In 1475 Pope Sixtus IV presented the mosaic icon preserved in Chimay to Philippe de Croy, the Burgundian envoy.[9] Enameled icons also enjoyed prestige, as can be seen from examples in Maastricht and in S. Prassede in Rome.[10] The Christ panel in Rome, as the inscription in the enamel frame tells us, once depicted Christ as Benefactor (*Euergetēs*), to whom a famous monastery in Constantinople was dedicated.

Imported icons were often prized for their technical extravagance or their costly materials of mosaic, enamel, silver, and steatite. It was not until the thirteenth century that painted icons played an important part in the development of Western panel painting. The icons that inspired this development did not need to be famous ones but often became famous only in the Renaissance, when panel painting was a commonplace affair and the imported icons no longer embodied an artistic ideal but represented a religious tradition that faced the threat of extinction.

The fascination of the icons' origin in the East can no longer be traced back to a given time, but the belief in archetypes that had come from the land of the Bible via Byzantium was universally held by the thirteenth century,[11] as we learn from a sermon by Fra Giordano in Florence (chap. 14e). The body relics were joined by images with an authentic Eastern archetype, whose claim for verisimilitude had to be met by the replica painters. The image painted by St. Luke challenged painters to emulate their apostolic colleague. The Greek icon, thus defined as an ideal attained by only a few originals in the West, took on a multitude of functions, which will be outlined in the following pages.

The imported icon was more important as an *idea* than as a *fact*. The idea could be attached indiscriminately to Western products, whose prestige rose with their alleged provenance. Nevertheless, a considerable number of icons were actually imported. This issue will be discussed first, and we shall try to give a fair account of the miraculous or disreputable circumstances in which icons were acquired. Icons sealed state agreements, were valuable spoils of war, and assigned prestige to the foundation of monasteries. Wherever an Eastern icon—usually reputed to be of great age—made its appearance, it inaugurated a cult in the same way a relic did, bringing fame and wealth to the place or owner. The pattern was always the same. First of all the provenance was important, then the manner of acquisition, which gave credence to the claim of origin. A princely or royal donor could guarantee even the most unbelievable provenance. Legends about the icon's origin and miracles then sprang up, becoming ever more audacious and not hesitating to use forged documents. When entire treatises were devoted to the images, during the Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation, the interweaving of truth and invention often became quite impenetrable.

According to a good tradition, the official icon of Mary, patron of Venice, was seized from the Byzantine general's chariot during the siege of Constantinople (chap. 10d). By its name, *Nicopeia*, the original in S. Marco still recalls the Virgin's Byzantine role as army leader and bringer of victories. At state festivities and pilgrimages in Venice the icon embodied the true sovereign, reigning over and above the republican state. Similarly, the ownership of the original of the *Hodegetria* produced

an open conflict that was fought out in the streets of Constantinople in 1204 between two Venetian parties representing the state and the church (chap. 4d). Miracle-working icons were readily used as pledges for the sealing of state agreements, as we learn from an image of Christ that was given by the Byzantine emperor to the captain of the Genoese on the Bosporus, Lionardo Montaldo, who in turn donated it to a church in Genoa in 1384 (chap. 11a). It is, in fact, one of the few old replicas of the original of the cloth image, and it bears its own history like a seal of authenticity in the illustrations on its fourteenth-century metal mounting.

Other icons reached their new owners in less spectacular fashion. The so-called Madonna della Pace in Venice was a recent work when it was acquired by the Venetian Paolo Morosini in Constantinople in 1349.[12] In the dignity of the Christ Child and the treatment of the face, it is close to a Mount Sinai icon that we know to have been designed by the painter Manuel of Constantinople. Despite the overpainting, it still clearly has the character of an Eastern product. It achieved high honor in Venice once it was taken over by the Dominicans of SS. Giovanni e Paolo.

When an icon passed from private to church ownership, it often acquired the historical legends that would make it suitable as a public cult image. The icon of the Virgin in the cathedral of Spoleto, a Byzantine masterpiece from about 1100, had had two private owners before it found public honor in the cathedral at Spoleto (chap. 15d). On the metal frame a Greek woman from southern Italy redirects toward herself the original painted petition of the Madonna, concealed by the new mounting. This person's private inscription, however, did not prevent the bishop of Spoleto from considering the icon as a penitential gift from Emperor Barbarossa to Spoleto.

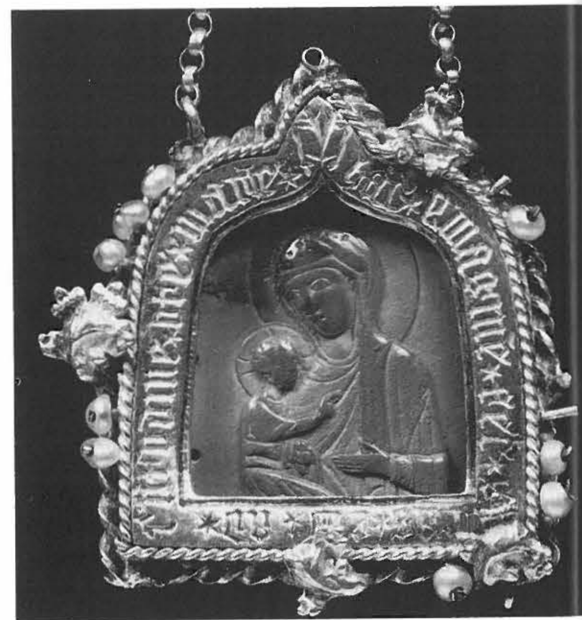
A similar panel of the Virgin had already passed through many hands before Bishop Nicodemus Della Scala donated it to his cathedral in Freising in 1440.[13] Its first state can be seen only by X-ray, which reveals an unusual work from about 1100. In a second phase in Constantinople shortly before 1235, a prelate named Manuel gave it a metal mounting on which is inscribed the poetic title "Hope of the Hopeless" (*Elpis tōn Apelpismenōn*). Within this new metal frame, finally, it was completely repainted in the early fourteenth century, before coming by a roundabout way into the possession of the Della Scala family, perhaps as a gift from the Byzantine emperor. Nicodemus Della Scala, bishop of Freising from 1421, donated the icon to the new large shrine-altar by Jakob Kaschauer, on which it was displayed on the four feasts of the Virgin each year. Naturally, in the meantime it had also become an original painted by St. Luke.

b. The Imperial Court in Prague and Its Icons

New rulers could bolster their authority by donating miraculous icons from the East, the cult of which included loyalty to the donor. In 1382, with Pauline hermits from Hungary, a prince from the house of Jagiellon founded the monastery of Jasna Góra in Poland, where prayers were said for the continuation of the dynasty. The monastery's prestige was enhanced by the gift of the icon of Czestochowa.[14] Whether it is in fact an Italian or an Eastern work is of secondary importance, for only the official legend mattered in this context. The Madonna of Brno might, if cleaned, turn out to

201. *Freising, Cathedral Museum; X-ray photograph of a Marian icon in its original state, ca. 1100*

202. *Aachen, cathedral treasury; votive icon of Louis d'Anjou, king of Hungary, 14th and 19th centuries*



203. *Cleveland, Museum of Art; St. Luke Icon from Aachen, Byzantine, 12th and 14th centuries*

be an Eastern imported image.[15] It was part of the program by which the House of Luxembourg established itself as ruler of Bohemia and Moravia. In 1356 Emperor Charles IV bequeathed it to the order of Augustinian hermits newly founded by his own brother, Margrave John Henry. The founder's son had the image of the "Black Madonna" of Brno mounted in gold and silver.

In Prague, where interests transcended local matters, the emperor introduced a public cult on a grand scale dedicated to the sacred imperial treasures.[16] These were put in place at Burg Karlstein, where relics ranked higher than images. Devotional images were imported from Italy, but local panel painting nevertheless scored a major triumph when the walls of the Chapel of the Holy Cross were covered with an unbroken series of panel images that represented the saints of the local calendar and even included a body relic.[17] The assembly of saints forms a kind of heavenly council, expressed in the metaphor of the shining walls of the heavenly Jerusalem. The individual saints are embodied in icons, joined together as in an iconostasis. In the foundation's charter (1357), the cross of Christ is indeed recognized as the center of worship, but the same text speaks of the longing for Christ's face, "which not only all humankind" but also the angels desire to see.[18]

Imported icons may have received public veneration in Prague. Replicas of the Madonna of S. Sisto (chap. 15c) and of the Roman Veronica in Prague cathedral[19] confirm the high status that the cult of icons enjoyed at the imperial residence. But evidence of a personal cult of icons rests on a small Byzantine steatite icon from the (203) twelfth century in the museum at Cleveland that Emperor Charles IV once donated to Aachen cathedral.[20] Napoleon even played a part in this icon's complex travels, as the small image was handed over, probably not quite voluntarily, to Empress Josephine in 1804.

In the Middle Ages the same icon served in the mise-en-scène of a state cult, embodied at that time in the person of Charlemagne. It is not known how or when the Byzantine icon arrived at Aachen. In the fourteenth century it was believed to have hung around the neck of Charlemagne's corpse when his tomb was opened in 1165. Charles IV had the small image mounted in silver and, in all likelihood, ordered it to hang from the new relic bust of Charlemagne like a talisman. On the mounting we read: "This image was painted by the holy evangelist Luke in the likeness [*similitudinem*] of the Blessed Virgin Mary." St. Luke's bull on the reverse gives further weight to the attribution.

The imperial cult of images seems to have inspired the gift of icons made in 1367 by Louis of Anjou, king of Hungary and Poland, to the Hungarian chapel in Aachen minster, which he had built.[21] The icons are votive panels with mountings, which (202) follow the Eastern pattern of the "embellished icon" by including a painted figure within a costly metal case (chap. 12d). Although they were thoroughly painted over about 1870, they still clearly indicate that, in the type of image, they followed the small icon allegedly made by St. Luke. (*203*)

Within the milieu of the imperial court in Bohemia, an unusual piece of evidence throws light on the mechanisms by which a famous icon imported from the East was multiplied. This is an icon in Březnice that, according to an inscription on the back, (204)

was commissioned by King Wenceslaus in 1396.[22] The royal commission required, the text states, "a replica [*similitudinem*] of the image in Rudnycz [Roudnice]," which, it also says, "St. Luke painted by his own hand." So far this is a familiar situation. The king has a Lucan icon copied, with the intention of transferring the power of the original to a new place by means of an exact copy. The surviving panel, itself a copy of the copy of 1396, served a purpose that was commonplace in such cases.

But the image has a surprising discovery to offer, as its type proves that the model at Roudnice must indeed have been an imported icon. The Virgin's dark skin, indicating an Eastern workshop, by an inscription alluding to the Song of Songs is explained as a biblical metaphor for Mary's beauty: "I am black, but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem" (Song of Sol. 1:5). A cloth with a strikingly bright pattern, which overlaps the veil of the Virgin, and the richly embroidered garment of the reclining child both point to an icon from Crusader circles in Cyprus, which reached the Mount Sinai monastery in a contemporary replica.[23] Apart from a small variation of gesture, the Mount Sinai icon is virtually a mirror image of the Bohemian panel, which, therefore, must have been produced via mechanical copying or tracing.

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The discovery that King Wenceslaus had a copy made of an icon from the crusader milieu is interesting enough. But it is possible to go one step further and to trace the genealogy of this particular icon even beyond the time of the Crusades. In icon painting, changes from one image to the succeeding one take place gradually, step by step, so that the features of an ancestor image are never lost altogether in the following one. The erstwhile Bohemian imported image and the Mount Sinai panel were both replicas of a common model, which was painted for a Crusader site in Cyprus in the thirteenth century. The almost modish dress and the decorative taste reveal the common model to be the work of a Western artist who had assimilated the syntax of Eastern icon painting in his own way. The Child alludes to Christ's sleep in death (*anapesōn*), a well-known motif of Cypriot icon painting in the twelfth century.[24] The Mother reproduces the most famous icon that was to be found in Cyprus, as the strangely displaced headcloth distinguishes the icon of Kykkos, which came from Constantinople and was reputed to have been painted by St. Luke (chap. 13f).[25]

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In this way the fantastic claim of a genealogy of the Bohemian panel from a work by St. Luke actually goes back to an archetype from Constantinople that was taken to Cyprus in the twelfth century and that generated a number of local variants in the thirteenth. Among the latter, a version by a Western painter attained fame for reasons unknown today. The surviving replicas at Mount Sinai and in Bohemia faithfully reproduce this third stage of the image's development. The many cult sites in Cyprus had previously favored a number of subtle changes, which invested each variant with a kind of local identity. Thereafter, this development was suspended and the formulation reached by the icon ready to be exported was protected by a kind of copyright. This account well illustrates the various effects of the external history of an image on its formal development, either encouraging or discouraging changes. With its royal patronage, the Bohemian replica now exerted only the fascination of an authentic archetype in which nothing was to be changed.

The resistance to change that canonized a given icon at first was a Western attitude that reflected the distance of imported icons from their place of origin. Where the original meaning of icon types was unfamiliar, any arbitrary variant could take on the authority of a binding original. Thus a different variant of the Virgin of Kykkos generated a faithful Apulian replica that is now in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome.[26] It represents an early stage in the evolution of the individual Cypriot variants.

The relation of East and West in our case is thus more complex than it might appear at first. In the West, only icons with an awe-inspiring origin were respected as canonical, while icons produced in the West were not subject to such restrictions. Different approaches were adopted, therefore, depending on whether the painter was reproducing a particular "original" from the East or was free of such obligations. Only in the former case were the gestures and postures schematically prescribed. This procedure seems primarily to have been designed to transfer the aura of Eastern models to exact replicas. It expresses the distanced perspective the painters had of the works of a different culture. In the East, by contrast, painters delighted in playing with the spectrum of thematic associations accessible to everyone, which shifted from work to work (chap. 13f), and they enjoyed a limited freedom of formulation that was all the more effective within these limits, at least in a time prior to the Turkish conquest. Though this statement contradicts received notions, it is hardly possible to draw a different conclusion from the historical material.

c. The Migration of Images to Italy

Most of the imported icons we know are linked to Italy. The *Sainte Face* in Laon, an Eastern panel from the thirteenth century, was in Rome when the papal treasurer sent it to his sister in France "instead of the Veronica" (chap. 11c). Imported icons piled up in Venice from the thirteenth century on, and they were still coming in from the East in the seventeenth century when Crete fell into the hands of the Turks.[27] In Apulia too a wide repertory of imported icons was used, but few of these Eastern originals have survived. The same is true of Pisa, where painters successfully reproduced Eastern icons.[28] A small icon of St. Michael, however, the only surviving Eastern work, has a Western motif in the weighing of souls.[29]

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Eastern icons sometimes were commissioned for an Italian destination, as is the case with an icon in St. Peter's in Rome.[30] Like an image within an image, it quotes the two "original" portraits of the Princes of the Apostles and, in the lower zone, introduces the Serbian patron, the queen mother Helen (d. 1314), from the house of Anjou, a Roman Catholic. Helen's sons Dragutin and Milutin, without compromising her as regent, were given a secondary role, while Helen bows before St. Nicholas of Bari, the namesake of the reigning pope. As a type of image, the panel is not really an Eastern icon, but merely a product of Eastern painting that, as votive gift, took on a Roman profile.

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Sometimes there were reasons to disguise an Eastern provenance and to substitute a Western legend that was to conceal it. The owner, in the end, decided which origin was the right one. In Rome a small mosaic icon from the East was purported to be the "Image of Gregory," which Gregory the Great in Rome had commissioned

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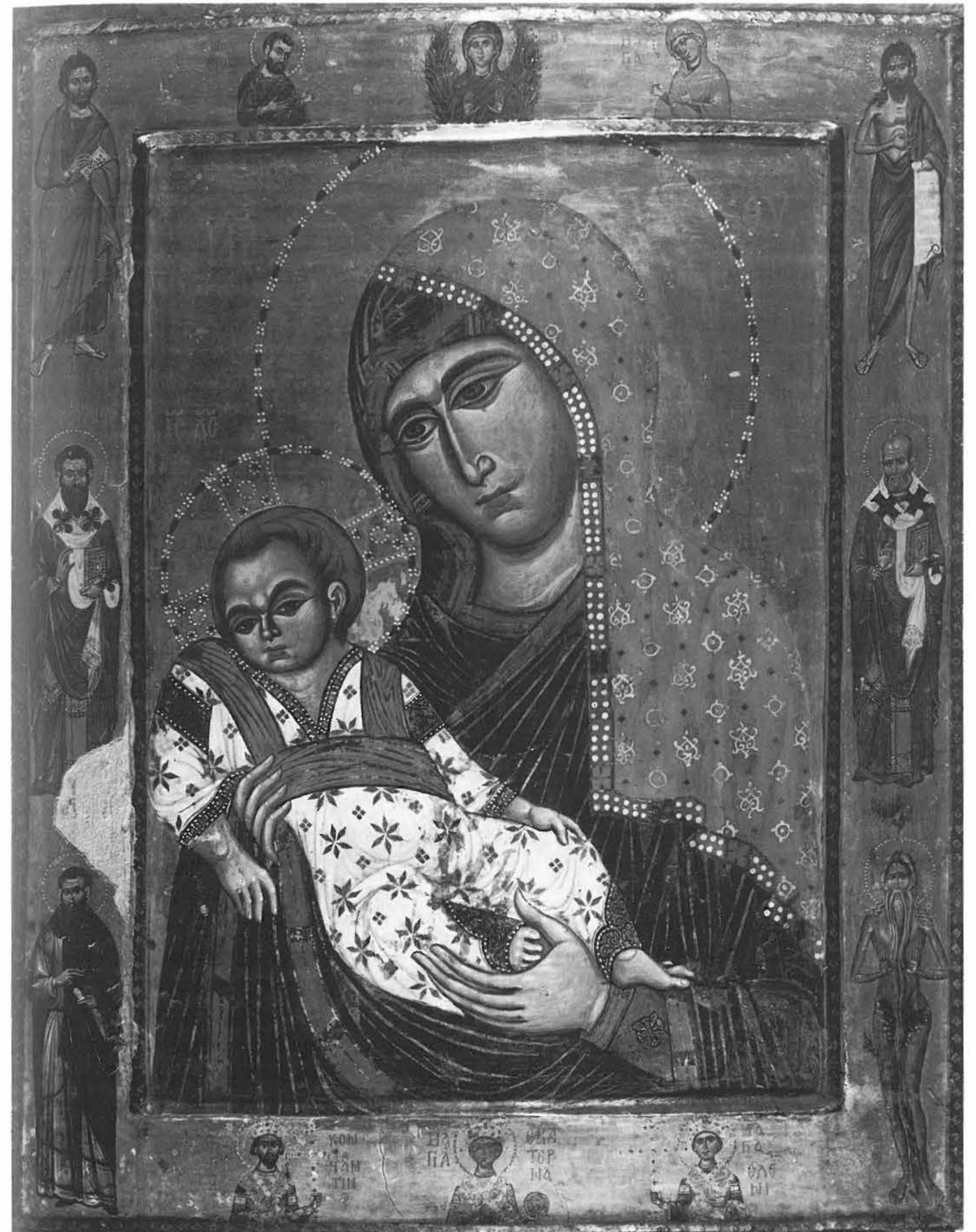
204. Prague, National Gallery; icon from Březnice, 1396

205. Mount Sinai, monastery of St. Catherine; Crusader icon from Cyprus, 13th century



206. *Rome, St. Peter's; votive icon of the Serbian Queen Mother Helen, 13th century*

207. *Rome, S. Croce; mosaic icon from Mount Sinai, ca. 1300*

around the year 600 to commemorate the true appearance of Christ during the Passion, which was revealed to him in a vision.[31] The image in question, which in fact arrived only in 1380, was kept, appropriately, in S. Croce in Gerusalemme, where the pope celebrated Good Friday services. The military leader Raimondello Orsini del Balzo, whose coat of arms it bears, had discovered it in the Mount Sinai monastery, where the icon had been sent from Constantinople, the site of its production in about 1300. Raimondello, who claimed to have stolen the ring finger from the remains of St. Catherine, founded a hospital in Galatina on the south coast of Apulia, which he dedicated to St. Catherine. We do not know what induced him to part with the icon so soon. The legend of the Carthusians of S. Croce promptly annulled the prehistory of the image, which can be reconstructed only from archaeological and historical evidence.

The type of the image was well established in the West when the Eastern icon suddenly was introduced as the archetype. Lost images from the East that came to the notice of Italian painters at an early date had a far greater influence on the history of the types they dealt with. A rare exception is the small image of the Virgin in the Chiesa del Carmine in Siena, which has proved to be a Byzantine masterpiece from the mid-thirteenth century.[32] The fresh modeling, together with the transparent glazes, creates a lively play of light and shade on the dark flesh color. The Mother's intense feelings revealed by her features and the movement of her body are contrasted with the aloofness of the child, who, also by the colors of his clothes, keeps a unique aura of his own.

VI

We seldom come across an imported image in such good condition, which makes us understand the impact it had on the people at the time. The fame of the image, however, rested more on its provenance, which was guaranteed by the hermits of the order of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel. The Carmelites, who spread rapidly throughout Europe from the mid-thirteenth century on, earned their reputation from their origin in the Holy Land, where they had lived on the mountain of the prophet Elijah. Their prestige was transferred to the images they owned, which in turn had to be old enough to be able to confirm the age of the order.[33]

The full-length enthroned figure of the Madonna del Popolo in the Carmelite mother church in Florence is, however, a local work commissioned by the confraternity of the town and should not be confused with the imported icons that may also have existed there.[34] Nor was the icon at Siena the only image owned by the Carmelites. The Madonna dei Mantellini, a Pisan work about 1280, as the votive image of the local confraternity, held the second rank beside the Eastern icon, which may perhaps also have once been called a Madonna del Popolo and even inspired copies in Rome, where the church of S. Maria del Popolo acquired a replica.[35]

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The close resemblance of the Roman panel to the imported icon in Siena is surprising enough to require an explanation, which still is wanting (chap. 15c). The resemblance is present in details like the deep blue garment of the Virgin, with its double braiding on the sleeve; the light blue, striped hairband; or the fringe on the hem of the veil at the shoulder. Even the curious seated posture of the Child with the gold-highlighted garment is repeated. In view of the exactitude of the copy, the de-

viations are all the more important. On one hand they concern artistic qualities, the flesh color being flatter, the Child's body more solid; on the other hand, the copyist has changed the Child's gesture. He now gently touches the ring-adorned hand of his Mother, which introduces affective qualities that the artist failed to convey by the faces.

d. Icons by St. Luke in the Historical Legends of the Renaissance

208 Surprisingly, the replica in Rome attained greater prestige than its model in Siena when it was considered to be an image painted by St. Luke. This identification may well be explained by the interest of the Della Rovere family in rebuilding the titular church of the cardinal. In 1478, as pope, Sixtus IV confirmed the Virgin's image in S. Maria del Popolo as an authentic image by St. Luke and encouraged gifts for the rebuilding by offering indulgences. Alexander Sforza, ruler of Pesaro and papal general, had already had the icon copied by Melozzo da Forli about 1470, with the following inscription added: "This was painted by the *divus Lucas* from life [*vivo*]. The panel is the authentic portrait [*propria effigies*]. Alexander Sforza commissioned it, Melozzo painted it. St. Luke would say it was his own work [*diceret esse suam*]." The copy in the monastery of Montefalco, then owned by the Augustinians of S. Maria del Popolo, adheres to an archaic ideal even in its technique, an almost transparent, fluid tempera painting. Among the further replicas, those by Pinturicchio hold the first rank.[36]

Alexander Sforza was also interested in a second image by St. Luke in Rome, for

21 he commissioned Antoniazzo Romano to copy the old icon in S. Maria Maggiore and to add this inscription: "In Rome there is the very holy image of the Virgin, once painted by St. Luke. Who would dare to question the authenticity of St. Luke's own work? I, the Roman painter Antoniazzo, have followed it in [my picture] [*ab illa duxi*], and Alexander Sforza has paid for the work."[37] The fame of the painter, which was now becoming an important factor, complements the continuing fame of the original, which guaranteed that the painting was no mere invention. From now on, a double justification credits the painter with a kind of modern interpretation of the ancient, faded original, while crediting the latter with the truth contained in the copy, just as the living model guarantees the truth of a portrait.

Along with replicas that changed in appearance in the hands of the Renaissance painters, the legends about the originals also changed in their argument. At a time when people were beginning to think in historical terms and no longer blindly accepted the old traditions, they expected the old images to offer credible evidence of their age and provenance that would withstand the doubts of the educated.

In Rome the Greek émigré Bessarion, who had become a Roman cardinal, commissioned Antoniazzo to make reproductions of icons by St. Luke, or images that were purported to be so.[38] Constantinople, which had fallen into the hands of the Turks (1453), offered a convincing provenance of images that also could be mobilized for a crusade. This probably explains why in 1482 Clemente of Toscanella declared an icon he gave to S. Agostino in Rome to have come from Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.[39] The surviving panel, however, dignified with the Roman iconic titles of a

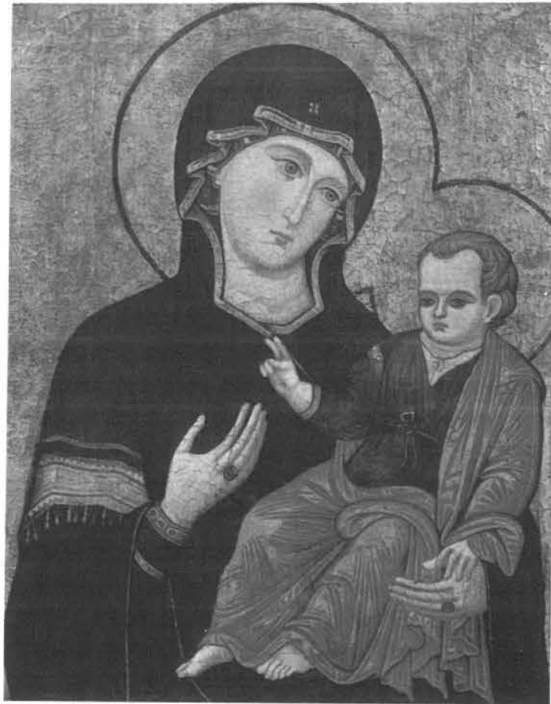
Virgo virginum and a *Mater omnium*, is so heavily overpainted that the legend can no longer be tested for authenticity. In the Greek abbey of Grottaferrata near Rome, Bessarion supported a new cult for a thirteenth-century image of the Virgin by declaring it to be the work of St. Luke.[40]

In Padua two miraculous images by St. Luke challenged each other's status in the fifteenth century, although neither icon came from the East. The fourteenth-century image in the Cathedral has the Child as a crib figure in swaddling clothes. When it fell from the altar and was broken to pieces in 1641, it was reconstructed according to Giusto de' Menabuoi's copies. After Antonio Zabarella (d. 1441) had made rich endowments for its cult, its importance grew steadily. In a rich silver mounting of 1498 it appeared at processions of the cathedral chapter. The type of image, however, is clearly designed for a local nativity play and in this respect is in open contrast to Eastern images of the Virgin.[41]

This deficiency caused historians of the fifteenth century to comment on the unusual features, particularly as the Benedictines of the abbey of S. Giustina owned an accredited image by St. Luke in the old panel of the Madonna di Costantinopoli, 209 which looked totally different.[42] Housed in the Prosdocimo chapel, it was directly connected to the cult of St. Luke at the abbey, where, it was claimed, the remains of the evangelist had been found in 1177. Greek monks were said to have rescued them from the church of the Apostles in Constantinople in the eighth century during the iconoclast controversy. It is difficult to decide whether the panel, today a ruin, was painted in Venice in the thirteenth century, or whether it had been imported and was touched up by a Venetian painter. In the era of the new cult of St. Luke that was flowering in the Renaissance, and at the site of his tomb, it was considered to be an original by his hand, which demonstrated his skill as a painter. Bishop Barozzi of Padua (1487–1507) thus reassured the monks of S. Giustina that they really had an icon by St. Luke in their possession.

But what, then, was to be said of the image in the cathedral, which in the fifteenth century was believed to be the work of the painter Giusto? The dissimilarity with the monks' icon was so obvious, and the attribution to a local painter so widespread, that the traditional association with St. Luke faced two serious problems. The solution offered by Michele Savanarola in his travel guide from the mid-fifteenth century is as simple as it is brilliant. Giusto, he said, wanted to paint a replica of the other image by St. Luke. "In so doing, it is said, he avoided similarity to a work painted by such sacred hands by using new motifs [*configurationibus*]."[43] The very deviation from the model offers the desired proof, being a sign of the artist's modesty before the apostolic painter. All the same, Michele continues, "I have seen both of them, and I cannot say that they are so dissimilar. The image by Giusto is likewise held in honor in our cathedral."

A famous icon in Bologna well illustrates the reasoning inherent in the fabrication 210 of legends, since the respective legends developed over the centuries and, since, in this case, we can discern fact and fiction. The Madonna di S. Luca is the treasure of an enormous church complex on the Monte della Guardia, connected to the town by endless columned porticoes, through which the patron saint came to visit her town in



208. Rome, S. Maria del Popolo; Madonna and Child, 13th century

209. Padua, S. Giustina; Madonna di Costantinopoli, Venetian, 13th century

210. Bologna, Monte della Guardi; St. Luke icon, 13th century

feast-day processions.[44] The site was originally the abode of a community of women hermits, who had fought for recognition of their legal status since 1249. In 1253 they received gifts from the town "for the veneration of their Virgin." This clearly refers to the surviving icon, which cannot be significantly older. It has the character of an Eastern icon and is framed by a plaster relief that imitates a metal mounting. The vivid chiaroscuro and the gold hatching also seek to resemble Greek icon painting, but the style points to the painters of the baptistery at Parma, and the shape of the eyes has its closest parallels there. The panel was therefore probably commissioned by a patron of the hermits from a painter in the Emilia.

As events in Rome so clearly proved (chap. 15b), the independence of the powerless was an important stimulus for the local cult of an image that secured protection and prestige for its owner. On the hill near Bologna the dispute over the legal status of the small convent actually had gone on since 1192. At that time a woman named Angelica had placed it under the government of the canons of S. Maria de Reno but had also claimed a personal lay patronage. Even the pope was brought in to resolve the dispute. When a new community was formed in 1249, it responded to the continuing legal dispute by introducing the miraculous icon, which from now on was to represent the case of the women hermits.

The legends took a new turn and argued that the icon had come from Constantinople when, in the fifteenth century, the icon had become the official image of the community at Bologna. In 1433, after a period of persistent rain, the bishop and council decided to carry the icon into the town in procession and beg Mary's intercession. Bologna wanted to emulate Florence, which in such circumstances called on the icon of Impruneta either to make rain or to protect itself from rain.[45] When the efforts to change the weather in Bologna proved successful, the procession was made an annual institution in 1476. The attribution of the icon to St. Luke, already mentioned by Grazioso Accarisi in 1459, went hand in hand with the rebuilding of the church. The legend now has a pilgrim at Hagia Sophia in Constantinople discovering an icon of the Virgin whose inscription stated that she wished one day to go to the hill at Bologna. Even documents were now forged and deposited in the relevant archives. The most important of them, with the faked date of 8 May 1160, records the alleged donation of an icon by the hand of Luke to the women hermits Azolina and Beatrice. The icon, says the text, was "brought from Constantinople by a Greek hermit named Theoclys Kmnia, to be kept at the hermitage on the Monte della Guardia."[46] The age of the icon and its Eastern origin had become important only with the new role as city icon in the Renaissance.

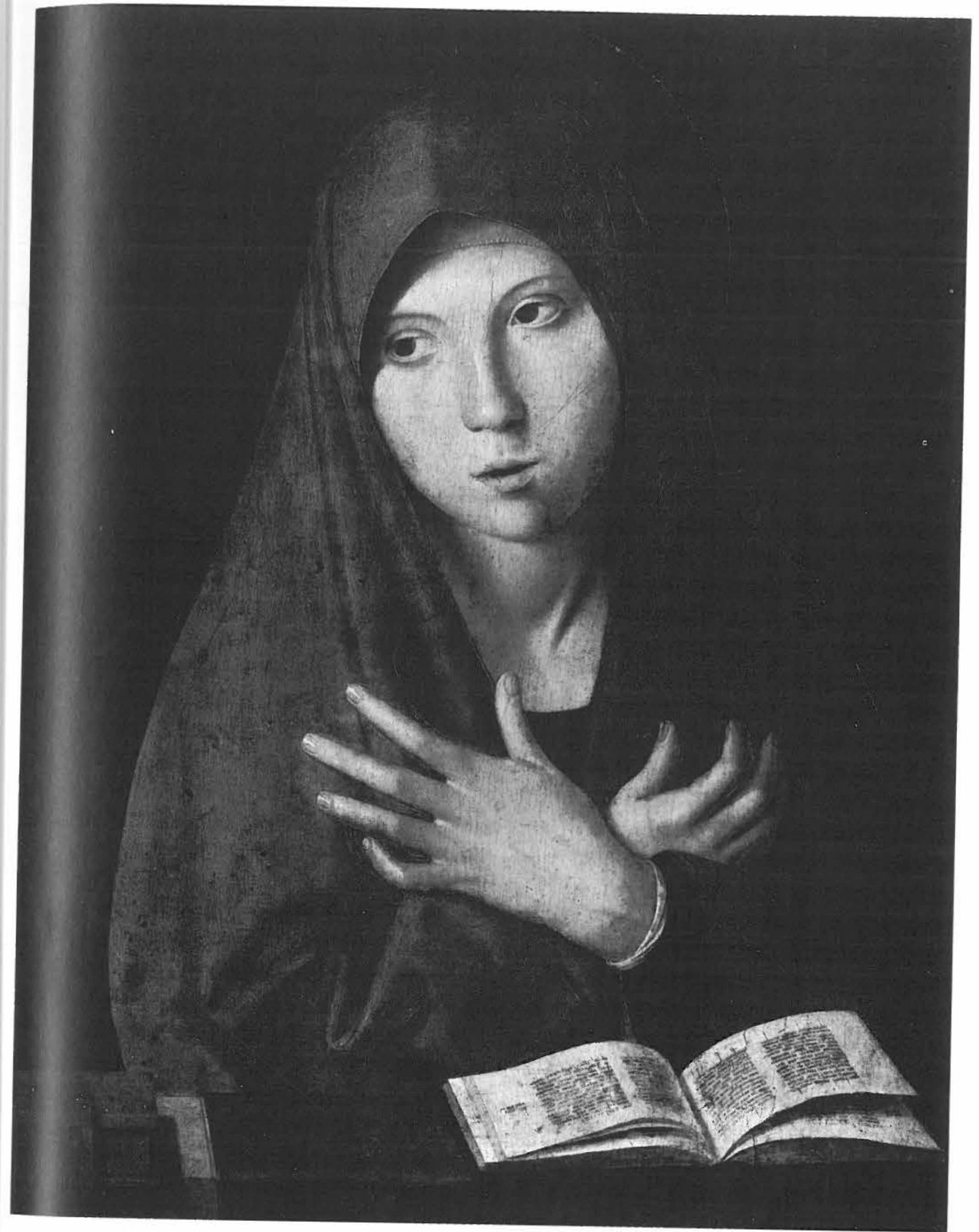
It was a different situation again, when the town of Fermo in the Marche, near the coast of the Adriatic, inaugurated a local cult of an icon by St. Luke. About 1470 a citizen named Petrus, who was of Albanian origin, set up a public cult of an icon that attracted people from far and wide but benefited only the icon's owner. Thereupon Giacomo delle Marche (1391–1476) in 1473 offered "an icon [*conam*] with the figure of the Virgin painted by St. Luke and being worthy of cult," on the condition that the town should substitute it for the other icon and should establish a solemn procession.[47] The town, whose interests had suffered from the illegal promotion of a

private icon, took the new icon, which was believed to be a true original, into possession all the more readily, as the donor Giacomo, a pupil of St. Bernardino, had earned fame as a preacher in the Crusades and had often traveled to the East. When he left the icon at Fermo, he was on his way to the court of Naples, where he died soon thereafter.

VII The icon in the cathedral of Fermo, which was the object of the transaction, poses one of the greatest riddles in the history of icon painting. The metal frame with Greek feast images and inscriptions persuaded a scholar of the standing of André Grabar to consider it an import from the East.[48] Scholars of Italian painting, not taking the frame into consideration, believe the panel to be a regional work.[49] Its style, particularly the linear stylization of the features, suggests that it was produced in the late thirteenth century on the Italian Adriatic coast. Like the gold hatching on the purple garment, however, the opaque layer of paint over green underpainting points to Eastern icons, which also provided the concept of the image. But how did the Italian image come by its Eastern metal frame? The problem is further complicated by a Greek inscription running around the frame. Either it was distorted during restoration in 1818 or it was a Renaissance forgery from the start, for unlike other Greek titles on image frames, it is meaningless.

But the greatest mystery surrounds the image type itself, which represents the Virgin without the Child in a shoulder-length portrait with her hands crossed on her breast. It was interpreted early on as a Virgin of the Annunciation, as indicated by a Gothic reliquary attached at the lower edge of the picture and inscribed *Annuntiatio.* St. Giacomo therefore handed over the icon in the convent of Maria Annunziata. The cult of the Virgin who conceived had started in Florence with the miraculous image in the Servites' church, which was said to have been completed by an angel.[50] An iconic figure representing Mary's conception without narrating the Annunciation seems to have been evolved on the basis of an Eastern type that had actually been created for a different purpose[51] and had shown the Mother lamenting her dead Son.[52] The panel at Fermo repeats such a model but already shifts its meaning and indicates the new subject by means of the peaceful expression of the young Mother.

There is every reason to believe that Antonello da Messina was aware of this icon when he painted his famous pictures of the *Annunziata.*[53] He may have seen it in Naples, where St. Giacomo often stayed, or on the way to Venice soon after it had
211 attained public honor in Fermo. In the version in Munich the young woman is directed inward, where she has received God's Word, protecting the fetus under her closed mantle with crossed hands. The open prayer book makes symbolically visible the Word of God, which at this moment is growing secretly toward visibility in Mary's womb. The artist thus links the problem of visibility with a new conception of the image, which he defines in a radically new way. Against the dark background the image looks like one of the portraits at which Antonello excelled. The psychological depths of Mary's expression and gestures are close to the qualities of a portrait. Yet Antonello transcends the ordinary portrait by the implied narrative of the Virgin's pregnancy. When the divine epiphany is being prepared in the mortal woman, the prototype, which alone demands veneration, is invisibly present in the visible image.



211. Munich, Alte Pinakothek; Antonello da Messina, Maria Annunziata, *ca. 1475*

Antonello understood well the meaning of the old icon and in his modern icon reinforced the antithesis of the visible and the invisible, of the image and its prototype, as a visual paradox.

The long history of imported icons in the West, which reaches from the twelfth century to the Renaissance, cannot be summed up in a simple formula. Nevertheless, certain patterns stand out that continued to play a role in the public use of icons from the East, whose fame rested on their age and on their capacity to perform miracles or on their miraculous origin. Their role usually is linked to a given institution that introduced or appropriated them in order to gain prestige or to renew legal claims. Replicas were commissioned, which in turn drew attention to the fame of the original icon. Special occasions were devised when the icons could "appear" in public. The respective owners took care to link the icons closely to their own needs of self-representation.

The impact of such icons on panel painting in the West differed according to the various stages of development reached by Western panel painting. Three examples will illustrate this point. The Bohemian panel in Roudnice reproduced its model, which came from a Crusader milieu in the East, in a mechanical way. Strangely enough, the interest in a true facsimile then was stronger in the West, where the subtleties of Eastern types and their variants were unfamiliar. The image in S. Maria del Popolo in Rome "translates," as it were, its Eastern model from Siena, bringing it into the idiom of local Roman style. Finally, Antonello's panel of the pregnant Virgin recreates the model from Fermo in a radically modern conception of the image.

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Looking back on the examples we have studied, we realize that the idea of an icon from the East was more important than the fact of having an authentic panel in each case, and even encouraged the use of local replacements when originals were not available. The high value placed on imported icons continued up to and beyond the Renaissance. Most of the legends about icons that are known to us today actually date only from the Renaissance period. With the growing distance of their age and their aesthetic difference, the archetypes generated a new interest, which, in the end, conferred a kind of divine sanction on the making of all images, whatever their aesthetic creed was to be.

17. Norm and Freedom: Italian Icons in the Age of the Tuscan Cities

a. East and West in Comparison: What Is an Image?

The facts have been described many times, but their meaning still remains open to question. The painting of panel crosses, altarpieces, and devotional images emerged in Italy in the thirteenth century with the violence of an explosion, expanding in wider and wider circles. Latium, with its center Rome, to be sure had been an old enclave of the icon (chap. 15), and Venice also looked back at a long tradition in this respect (chap. 10d). Now Tuscany with its expanding towns was at the forefront of the movement. There, all the new types of altarpiece that were to be influential from now on had their origin, from the multifigured polyptych to the retable with a saint and the *pala* with the Virgin,[1] while in Venice, in contrast, went its own way with its ancona.[2]

If we want to analyze and to quantify this movement, we are still dependent on the valuable but insufficient list of works compiled by Edward B. Garrison, who published an "illustrated index" with seven hundred examples in 1949.[3] He called the material "Romanesque panel painting" to distinguish it from the "Gothic painting" of the age of Giotto. Garrison's list of surviving panels, though no longer up to date in every case, bears impressive witness to the flood of panel painting that seemed to come from nowhere. We must bear in mind, however, that the surviving works are only a small fraction of what actually was produced at the time.[4]

In his survey of the material collected, two genres stand out that had existed previously as single images in other media. The Madonna Enthroned, now a painted panel, occasionally with shutters, superseded the wooden or metal statue that had been housed in opening shrines behind the altars.[5] The panel cross, the *croce dipinta*, placed over the chancel entrance or on the altar,[6] again inherited metal or wooden crosses with a sculpture of the Crucified but was the first to adopt the fully painted version.[7]

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We may remember that the two basic types of Western cult image—the statue of the Madonna and of the crucified—are carried over into the medium of panel painting (cf. chap. 14). A third genre, the half-length icon of the Virgin,[8] by contrast had no tradition in the West from which it might have developed, but it was no doubt the legitimate heir to the icon. It soon grew to such prominence that even large-sized images of full figures came under its sway, and the multiwinged altarpiece, a genre that remained unknown in the East, from here took its inspiration.

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It is tempting to trace the stages of such a development, which displays a compelling logic. But what set the development in motion? Where did the commissions and where did the painters workshops suddenly come from? Anyone who initially sees only the "goals" of the development will eventually look back from them, as Vasari did, to the "beginnings." But anyone who seeks explanations will be interested in the milieu in which, for example, urban society and the new mendicant orders of Fran-